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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000553

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SUBJECT: ABDEL AZIZ AL-HAKIM ON "TIRESOME" SADRISTS, IDPS, AND SFA

REF: 07 BAGHDAD 3375 (SADR-BADR AGREEMENT)

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶1. (C) Summary:** Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador on February 24 that, despite contrary claims by "tiresome" Sadrists, the ISCI-Sadrist non-aggression agreement remains valid, though Hakim remains concerned about Sadrist thuggery and militia violence in Basrah and elsewhere. Looking reasonably healthy after medical tests and treatment in Tehran, Hakim divulged that the Iranian ambassador told him Iran is ready for trilateral talks with the USG and GOI, and stated he had hosted a meeting by the visiting Mayor of Tehran to discuss joint Baghdad-Tehran municipal cooperative projects funded with a USD 1 billion loan from Iran. The Ambassador urged the black-turbaned Hakim to use the March 2 Ahmadinejad visit to have a frank discussion about Iranian actions that undermine Iraq's stability. He also pressed Hakim to use his influence to promote sustained political momentum and progress. Hakim asserted that upcoming provincial elections must be transparent and conducted without threats and intimidation. He maintained that Iraq's political leaders must find a way to solve the IDP crisis by returning people to their homes and arranging for them to vote in their home areas. Hakim noted the important role for the Political Council for National Security (PCNS) in upcoming bilateral negotiations over a long-term security relationship, and he stressed the importance of concluding negotiations by June, prior to elections in Iraq and the U.S. End Summary.

Sadrists, Militia Violence, Iran

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**¶2. (C)** Having returned to Baghdad last week after ten days of medical testing and treatment in Tehran, Hakim appeared to be in fair health. The Ambassador pointed out that Muqtada al-Sadr's extended freeze order was a positive step, but the International Zone was attacked less than one day after it was issued. He asked about Sadrist-ISCI relations in light of recent public Sadrist assertions that the mutual non-aggression pact signed last October by Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr (reftel) is void due to ISCI breeches of the agreement. Hakim replied that the Sadrists are "tiresome" and that they were the ones who insisted on the agreement in the first place. The important thing, he declared, is that Iraqis are not being killed and that Iraq is governed according to its constitution. (Note: A senior ISCI aide clarified later that ISCI considers the agreement to be valid, and that the joint dispute resolution committees contemplated by the agreement still have contact. He characterized Sadrist claims to the contrary as "typical of the Sadrists, one of them says something and another says something completely opposite.") While militia violence is down in most provinces, Hakim continued, he continues to hear disturbing reports in Baghdad such as the de facto control by "outlaws" (read Sadrists) of 13 electricity transmission sub-stations through threats against station employees.

¶3. (C) Without implicating Sadrist by name, Hakim complained that 1750 people have been killed in Diwaniyah, Najaf, and Karbala in recent months. After the Ambassador noted that he heard much about ongoing militia violence during a recent visit to Basrah, Hakim stated that Iraq Security Forces (ISF) have dealt with militia violence in all places except Basrah and Amarah. The Ambassador queried Hakim's views of an ISF surge to supplement Basrah's insufficient GOI security presence. Hakim replied that he and Prime Minister Maliki had discussed the issue, and both are concerned about the apparent lack of will among GOI military leaders to confront the problem in Basrah, even if given sufficient forces.

¶4. (C) Noting ongoing Iranian support for militias through direct and indirect training in Iran and Lebanon, the Ambassador said the March 2 visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad is a good opportunity for Iraq's leaders to have a frank discussion with Iran about Iranian actions which undermine Iraq's stability. Iran should understand that a stable Shia-majority democracy in Iraq that does not threaten its neighbors or the region is in Iran's interests. The U.S. remains interested in trilateral dialogue with Iran hosted by the GOI, but Tehran abruptly canceled a scheduled meeting. Hakim divulged that Iran's ambassador to Iraq told him Iran is ready for talks this Tuesday: the Ambassador replied that there is insufficient time for some of our negotiating team members to arrive in Baghdad and that we will continue to work through the GOI to find a suitable date. Hakim stated that he had hosted a meeting recently with the visiting Mayor of Tehran and fifteen of his deputies, and had discussed joint Baghdad-Tehran city cooperative projects that would be funded by a USD 1 billion loan from Iran.

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Shia Arba'een Commemoration, Provincial Elections, IDPs

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¶5. (C) Hakim noted that one indicator of Iraq's improving security environment is the large number -- possibly millions -- of Shia pilgrims who are walking to Karbala from as far away as Basrah to participate in the February 28-29 Shia Arba'een commemoration (we note that there have been at least two reported fatal attacks on pilgrims today, one reportedly perpetrated by a suicide bomber that killed at least 25 people). The Ambassador and Hakim agreed that there is a new spirit of cooperation among Iraq's political class, and the Ambassador urged Hakim to continue to use his influence to promote sustained momentum and continued political progress. They also agreed that upcoming provincial elections will be of vital importance for Iraq, with Hakim stating that the process must be transparent and conducted without threats or intimidation. In a possible statement of support for an open-list system, Hakim said people must know for whom they are voting.

¶6. (C) Hakim remarked that a way must be found for displaced people to vote in their home areas, and he used this point to segue into a call for greater GOI and political party effort to deal with the issue of displaced persons. He said that Iraq's political and religious leaders must show real will to address this important issue and promote the formation of committees to solve the problem, thus making 2008 the year that displaced Iraqis return to their homes. The Ambassador observed that divided responsibility between the Ministry of Displacement and Migration and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is hampering GOI efforts to deal effectively with the problem. He urged Hakim to continue to work closely with Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, Tareq al-Hashemi, and others to demonstrate Sunni-Shia unity in solving this pressing issue.

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¶7. (C) The Ambassador remarked on the important role played

by the Political Council for National Security (PCNS), and said he understood that the PCNS will soon hold an important meeting. Stating that the PCNS represents 90 percent of all Iraqi political parties and groups, Hakim said the PCNS will have a particularly important role to play as bilateral negotiations over a bilateral security agreement unfold.

Unlike bilateral discussions over the Declaration of Principles in which the PCNS had no role, he continued, the PCNS will be involved and consulted during the negotiating process. Hakim stressed the importance of concluding negotiations by June, since both Iraqis and Americans will become preoccupied with their respective elections after that time.

¶8. (C) Hakim was joined in the meeting by his son Mohsen, who lives in Tehran and is in Baghdad for a visit. In reply to Mohsen's query about Turkish military incursions into Iraq, the Ambassador replied that Massoud Barzani appears to be taking a hard line on this issue and that the USG is trying to calm the situation. He urged Hakim to speak to Barzani and counsel him to moderate his stance, and Hakim agreed to do so.

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